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Protestant Episcopal Female Tract Society
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Series of Tracts.--No. 173.

FORBID THEM NOT.

BY REV. A. C. COXE.

It is the duty of Christian Parents to reflect that they have voluntarily entered into the Estate of Marriage, and that the great end of this Institution is the training of Children, "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This is asserted by the Prophet Malachi, when he declares the purpose of God, in establishing the indissoluble union of man and wife, as one flesh, to be "that He might seek a godly seed." (Malachi, ii. 15, and Eph. vi. 4.)

Parents having been the instruments of connecting the soul of their child with the first Adam, God has provided that they may also be the happy instruments of connecting him with the second Adam. By being "born of the flesh," the child partakes the first Adam's sinful nature; by the birth of "water and the Spirit," he partakes the second Adam's righteousness.

We know that the young child, though he appears innocent, is sinful in his nature, because he is a child of Adam; and so, when he is made the son of the Second Adam, we know that he is a partaker of grace, although he exhibits sinful dispositions, and has a great work to perform, before he can come to the full stature of a man in Christ. In point of fact, adult Christians exhibit the same remainder of their carnal nature, and the work is the same, whatever may be the moment of baptism. Grace is given, but the effectual employment of it, is the work of our probation. This grace is "free grace," and waits for no

man's deservings, since no man can possibly have any deservings. Christ offers it to all mankind, and would give it to all, did not actual transgression and impenitence hinder full-grown sinners from receiving it. Little children commit no actual transgression, and are not impenitent, and hence Christ says, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven."

This is recorded for our instruction in duty; and shows the great wrong of *forbidding* little children to come to Jesus, in Holy Baptism, which is the only way in which they can be brought to him, that he should "take them up into his arms, put his hands upon them, and bless them." For we must reflect that it is Christ who baptizes, by his disciples, and that they "stretch forth His hand to heal," when they minister in his name. (Compare St. John, iv. 2, with Acts, iv. 29, 30.)

Is it clear then that baptism is designed for little children? The answer is, that it is designed for *none but little children*, since adult persons can be baptized only by becoming as little children. This is evident from the words of Christ: "*Except ye be converted, and become as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven;" and again, "Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God, *as a little child*, he shall not enter therein."

From these texts, it is evident that conversion reduces an adult to the condition of a little child, and hence, makes him a fit subject for baptism. "*Of such* is the kingdom of heaven:" that is, the kingdom is composed of little children; those who are such literally, and those who become such, and continue such, by renewed penitence and grace. No adult is saved by his first conversion, unless he renews his repentance every day of his life: and children, on coming to years of discretion, are in just the same position. Daily penitence, and obedience, and faith are essential to their salvation, as much as if they had been baptized in their riper years. But the child has an

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immense advantage, if he has been trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and assisted daily by the grace of the Covenant, which is established in baptism. It is a sin to deprive children of this advantage, and hence CHRIST says, *forbid them not.*

Now, let us put a few texts together! Christ says: "Except a man be born of water, and of the Spirit, *he cannot enter* into the kingdom of God." But he also says, concerning little children, "*Of such* is the kingdom," and again, "except you be converted, and *become as little children*, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." It is manifest, from these texts, that children have a primary claim to "enter the kingdom," by being "born of water, and of the Spirit."

Further, the language of Prophecy as compared with the Gospel record, clearly shows that children are thus embraced in the great plan of Salvation. Isaiah says—"I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring:" and again, "He shall feed his flock like a Shepherd, *he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom.*" Now, compare this with the language of the Shepherd himself, to Christ's pastors—"Feed my sheep; *Feed my lambs.*" What is the necessary inference as to the admissibility of children into the flock of CHRIST?

But, it is said, there is no express command to baptize children. Let us see.

"Forbid them not"—to enter the kingdom, and to come to Christ—is very much like an express command. But, if not, how shall we interpret the Great Commission, "Go ye, and *make disciples*, of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; *teaching* them to observe all things, whatsoever I have commanded you." Are not children part of every nation, and are they not to be *made disciples*, that is, *learners*, in the school of Christ, and taught to observe all things which He has commanded? But they are made dis-

ciples, according to the text, by baptism. Then comes *training*, in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, on the basis of the discipleship, thus constituted. And here, we should remember how the Jewish nation, including their wives and their little ones, "were all *baptized* unto Moses, in the cloud and in the sea." The Apostle's argument requires the baptism of Christ to be equally comprehensive.

But, some object, that in another place the *teaching* seems to be put foremost: "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved." Here the first preaching of the Gospel is, confessedly, the prominent idea; and yet, when we reflect, that the phrase—"he that believeth," as has been shown before—is precisely equivalent to *he that is converted and becometh as a little child*, we see that children are to be regarded as believers, because they have that *spirit* of docility and discipleship, which our Saviour pronounces the prerequisite in all who are permitted to enter the kingdom of heaven.

It is, apparently, to guard against our hardness of heart, on this point, that we have that striking history in St. Matthew, (St. Matt. xviii. 2,) to which our Saviour adds the warning—"Whoso shall offend one of these *little ones*, *which believe in me*, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depths of the sea." This awful admonition ought to be pondered by those, who *forbid their children* to come to Christ: especially, when it is added—"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones: for I say unto you, that in heaven, their angels *do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.*" Here, the ministry of angels is referred to, as exerted in behalf of children; and we learn, from another Scripture, (Heb. i. 14.) that angels are "all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be *heirs of salvation.*" Children, therefore, are "heirs of salvation," and, as such, their spirit of docility, is accepted as faith, and

they are made "members of Christ, children of God, and inheritors of the kingdom of heaven."

Our Lord when he speaks of "little ones that believe in him," undoubtedly refers to the seed of faithful Abraham, as distinguished from the children of unbelievers. "If the root be holy, so are the branches." (Romans, xi. 16.) The Abrahamic Covenant was—"I will be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee:" and this covenant was to be administered to every Hebrew man-child, when eight days old. (Gen. xvii, 9—14.) The child that was not thus brought into God's family, was cut off from the covenant; he was said to have "*broken* God's covenant." Just so, the circumcised child, on the contrary, is called "one of these little ones that believe," or that *keep* the covenant.

If these views are correct, we shall probably find Holy Scripture agreeing thereto, in other places. Now take the first preaching of the Gospel, under the Great Commission. (Acts, ii. 38.) St. Peter says—"the promise is unto you, and *to your children.*" He refers to the promise of "remission of sins, and receiving the Holy Ghost," of which he had just spoken. So, St. John addressing different classes of members in the Church, says—"I write unto you, little children, because *your sins are forgiven you*, for his name's sake." Here the seal of forgiveness, Christian baptism, is plainly recognized: and when he says, again, "I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father," it seems to be implied that they had entered into God's family, and been made his children. Thus, in the Old Testament, it is said—"out of the mouths of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength;" and, in the Gospel, Jesus says—"I thank thee, O Father, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Children, as partakers of the blessings of the Covenant, are thus represented as *knowing* the hidden wisdom, "which none of the princes of this world knew." The more we reflect

upon what Holy Scripture says of children, the more we shall feel how vast may be the import of the words, "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

St. Paul declares, that baptism is the Christian circumcision. (Col. ii. 11, 12.) Now, circumcision was the special privilege of Abraham's children; and some express prohibition must be produced, before we can draw any other inference than that the Christian circumcision is designed for Christian children. "Else were your children *unclean*, but now are they *holy*," says St. Paul: words that plainly imply their admission to the covenant of God, and the fellowship of the saints.

It is sometimes said, that the analogies of circumcision do not hold; since female children were not circumcised. But, the answer is, that under the Gospel, the privileges of the female sex have been the subject of special regulation on this point. It is written, "As many of you as have been baptized into CHRIST, have put on CHRIST; there is *neither male nor female*, for ye are all one in CHRIST JESUS; and if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." (Galatians, iii. 27, 28.)

It is sometimes said, that "there seems to be no good result from the Baptism of Children." But the same objection might be made to prayers in behalf of children; and in some cases, even Christian "nurture and admonition" might be, with apparent force, depreciated by a similar objection. This is an answer to the assertion, admitting it to be true; but no one who reflects can admit it to be true, as a general fact. Baptism, when administered to children, and faithfully built upon, as the foundation of pious training, is seldom found lacking in manifest blessings. Where such is the unhappy case, it is surely paralleled by many cases of baptism in adult years. Baptized children, like baptized adults, may fall away, and "receive the grace of God, in vain."

Baptism is the grafting of the grace of GOD, upon the corrupt stock of human nature. If the graft is

nourished, and becomes the tree, it will "bring forth good fruit." Thus, by the promise made to disciples and *their children*, (Acts, ii. 38, II Peter, i. 4.) they become "partakers of the divine nature:" they are called, and elected, into the kingdom; and concerning those who give diligence to "make their calling and election sure," the Apostle says, they shall "never fall." Here the possibility of falling is implied; but, employing the figure of the graft, he says, in the same connection, "if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be *barren nor unfruitful* in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." The foundation of all this, is being "made partakers of the divine nature:" or, "born of water and the Spirit;" as it is written, "for *by one Spirit are we all baptized* into one body,.....and have been all made to *drink into one Spirit.*" Such being the advantages of Baptism, who can fail to see the importance of the precept, with regard to their children—"Suffer them to come—forbid them not."

Thus, there are the greatest reasons for the Baptism of Infants, derived from the plain letter of Scripture, and from the entire agreement of the Old and New Testaments on the principle of their admissibility to Covenant with God. But, when, in addition to this, we have the practice of the whole Church of Christ, from the beginning, in its favour, how daring it appears, in any one, to set up a contradiction thereto! For, to quote even a Puritan's testimony to the importance of such consent, says the learned John Owen, a divine of Cromwell's times—"What may be so confirmed will thence appear not to be an institution peculiar to any especial mode of worship, but to have *an everlasting obligation in it*, on all that worship God, as such, never to be altered or dispensed withal. And it is a brutish apprehension to suppose, that God would permit a persuasion to befall the Church in all ages, with respect unto His worship, which was not from himself, and the expression of its practice accepted with Him.'

Parents who obey this precept, and who faithfully follow it up, by training their children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," have the unspeakable consolation of having fulfilled their duty to their children, and they have a right to expect Covenant blessings upon them, even if they themselves should be prematurely removed. In that case applies, emphatically, the promise, "leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them;" "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed after thee." (See also Isaiah, lix. 21, and lxi. 8, 9.)

In the case of baptized infants dying before use of reason, we know that they are "meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light." "*The Father's name is written in their foreheads*," and "in their mouth is found no guile, for they are without fault, before the throne of God." Of unbaptized children we cannot know all this, for "the Father's name is *not* written in their foreheads." (Rev. xiv. 1.) Yet, if *without any fault of their own*, this great blessing of the Covenant be unobtained, let Christian parents not distress themselves, even though their child should die without christening. They must recognize in such a trial of faith, the Providence of Him, who doeth all things well. Had they neglected their duty, they might well regard themselves as chastised for their fault, and such should pray to be forgiven for unkindness to their own offspring. But, in general, we are permitted to confide in God, through the mercies of CHRIST, that no one dying before actual transgression is lost. God does not tell us that it is all the same with children whether they die under the Seal of the Covenant, or not: but one great principle underlies the whole subject of the Baptism and Salvation of Infants—even this, "it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish."

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